

"Labour, as is the case in so many tropical countries of great potential wealth, is the second greatest need. The Laotians' inadequacy, both numerically and psychologically, combined with the country's inaccessibility are almost insuperable obstacles to industrial or commercial progress. This was plainly seen when Laos's vast mineral wealth, especially in tin, attracted capitalist investment in the discreditable wave of mining speculation that spread over Indo-China in the late [376] 1920's. The Laotians have no sense of time, and a thousand obstacles and superstitions interfere with the accomplishment of work at a fixed date. Their physical stamina is not proof against epidemics, especially those maladies brought from foreign countries. Whole villages displace themselves at the slightest provocation. One Laotian proverb says: 'At the end of three days change your house; at the end of three years change your village.' What started as a necessity to escape invaders or soil exhaustion has become a habit, and a means of escaping any regular irksome task. The ease with which the Laotians drift across the Mekong into Siamese territory makes the French authorities very loath to take strict measures with them. Moreover, the European residents themselves, who would normally be the motive force behind any change, succumb to the prevailing atmosphere of su-su, the Oriental equivalent of dolce far niente."

"It is obvious that the future development of the country, as in Cambodia, cannot depend on any but imported labour. As ever, it is the prolific and industrious Chinese and Annamites who are flowing into Laos to the economic betterment of the land, but equally to the moral distress of its people. Middle Laos, from Savannakhet to Vientiane, is the region most subject to infiltration. Upper and Lower Laos will probably be cut apart by a wedge of foreign colonizers. The French cannot but favour this immigration. Laos is a terrestrial paradise offering an easy living, undisputed by the timid Laotians, to the miserable Annamites from the over-crowded Tonkinese delta. The Laotians, like the Khmers, prefer to withdraw rather than to struggle with their old enemies. A terse Laotian proverb crystallizes this ancient antagonism: 'Dog and cat, Annamite and Laotian.' In addition to taking their land and their women the Annamite has introduced vices like gaming and theft, and diseases like tuberculosis and syphilis. The contempt of the industrious and formalistic Annamite for the lazy and carefree Laotian is only matched by the latter's impotent hatred. Yet the evil is without remedy. Rich, unoccupied land will inevitably attract an industrious and prolific people like the Annamites, who are able and willing to do what Laotians cannot and will not do."

"The colonization schemes sponsored by the Indochinese government in other parts of the peninsula have not touched Laos. The local administration, however, has been encouraging small-scale settlements. The Société de l'Houle Pakhout has placed 12,000 coffee plants upon the plateau of Boloven, and in the same region a group of natives has set out 100 hectares of kapotiers. The colonization of Laos cannot be initiated until the railroad from Tanap to Thaklek is completed, which will link up the interior to river navigation [sic] upon the Mékong. Here, as elsewhere, one of the chief problems is inadequate labor supply. (58)

58. Rapports au grand conseil, pp. 85 ff."

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are incapable of any initiative or any work.

The Laotian people taken as a whole needs to be guided and sustained at once firmly and gently. In accordance with the hallowed expression, "an iron hand in a velvet glove" is needed to lead them. What we need to make them understand, in order that they may profit thereby, is that the only purpose of the improvements which are proposed is to procure them a greater sum of well-being, a good which they are far from wanting.

By taking possession of Laos, it is to be hoped that we have assured its security for all time. The appreciable development of agriculture and trade during these last few years is proof that [513] [illustration] [514] [blank page] [515] the inhabitants have grasped the goal which we are pursuing. To increase the country's resources in order to bring about prosperity, this is the task to be accomplished. It is a duty which we cannot shirk without betraying our traditions, and without losing our prestige in the eyes of the peoples which have welcomed us as liberators and protectors in the true sense of the word, who conquered them by the heart and not by fire and sword.

2. COLONIZATION METHODS

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Although some of the higher regions of Laos have a climate approaching that of Algeria, it is not a colony to be populated. Europeans cannot engage in continuous physical labor there, and must limit themselves to a role of direction and supervision, leaving the heavy manual work to Orientals.

The question of labor is thus of prime importance for utilization of the country's resources. Yet given the sparse population density, its lack of aptitudes and the great distances between inhabited centers, it would seem to be no easy matter to count on the Laotians. They are above all a people of boatmen, drovers, carters and carmacks.

Nor can one employ the Khas. Although good mine, forest and agricultural workers, provided they do not have to leave their mountains and their forests, they are unsuited to any kind of work in the plains or low valleys.

Thus no other solution is left to the problem of recruiting workers than to have recourse to Annamite or Chinese immigration. Now, the Annamite is afraid to move; he (especially the delta Annamite) dreads staying in regions which are at all mountainous (1). Prejudices, super-

(1) The first Europeans who came to Laos know how difficult it was to recruit, in Annamite territory, a suitable force of "boys"

who were disposed to follow them.

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563 stitutions and perhaps also the opposition of the mandarins who for centuries have tried [516] to prevent any exodus towards the lands situated beyond the mountains, have in the long run made him a stay-at-home.

000 This industrious, intelligent and prolific people prefers to struggle for life in agglomerations which are too dense, rather than emigrate in order to obtain a life of well-being and ease.

We should not, however, despair of ever seeing the Annamites spread into Laos and there provide a powerful force for repopulation and make the low plains which border the Mekong from Cammon to Cambodia bear fruit. It is up to us to destroy the legends, to reduce to nothingness the superstitions which have gained currency, and then to use our influence to bring an end to the ostracism in which Laos is held. Does it not belong today to the great Indo-Chinese family in which all the component peoples are French subjects in the same right?

On the day when the mandarins no longer sustain a fear of Laos and a dread of slavery among the Annamites, it will be possible to induce them to emigrate into the Mekong basin. The colonies already in existence, particularly at certain points in Cammon, will grow from that day on through the addition of newcomers. We must not deceive ourselves and think that such immigration will not take time, and so in order to meet our most pressing needs European colonies in Laos will have to appeal to laborers from the southern provinces of China and especially from the island of Hainan, that inexhaustible reservoir which has supplied coolies to several parts of the world for so many years.

But, it will be asked, is Laos ready to welcome colonists who want to work the mines and forests and to engage in trade, agriculture and livestock breeding? We believe that, in the present state of communications, some of these undertakings are possible at this moment and that others cannot hope to succeed until the country's economic equipment has developed.

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185 As concerns commerce and the exploitation of forests and mines, we have noted that several attempts have already been made. These are valuable indications showing the [517] courses which isolated colonists or companies which would like to employ their capital in our new possession can follow as of the present time. Indeed, such undertakings yield profits almost from the very beginning, and if they are